DOCTRINE OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Let Virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy Confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the Doctrine of the Priesthood shall Distil upon thy soul as the Dews from Heaven. (D & C 121:45)

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THE COMMON ORIGIN OF ANCIENT HEBREW/PAGAN RELIGION AND THE DEMISE OF THE HEBREW GODDESS

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INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the Mormon religion espouses a belief in a "Mother in Heaven." What is not well known is that the ancient patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also believed in a Mother Goddess, and that She was worshiped by them, as well as by their posterity, for hundreds of years in the Jerusalem Temple. This then is the focus of this issue of *Doctrine of the Priesthood* — to reveal the existence and identity of the Mother Goddess of ancient Israel, and to tell the story of Her demise. This will be done by throwing light on obscure passages in the text of the Bible, in conjunction with many archaeological discoveries which have been made in our day in the Holy Land.

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by
Fred C. Collier

An abreviated version of this paper was delivered in Salt Lake City at the August 1989 Sunstone Symposium

It is comon knowledge that the Prophet Joseph Smith taught a doctrine about God which was radically different from contemporary Jewish/Christian religion. At the hearts core of his doctrine was the belief that in both form and person God was essentially a man. The first clear indication of this doctrine is found in the Book of Mormon which was the earliest publication

of the Church. Therein it is stated that God created man in shape and form after the image and likeness of His own body. The best example of this is found in the third chapter of Ether, where in response to prayer "the Lord stretched forth his hand and touched" sixteen different "stones one by one with his finger." Following this the Lord showed himself" in bodily form to the brother of Jared and then explained:

> Seest thou that **ye are created after mine own image?** *Yea, even all men were created in the beginning* **after mine own image**. (Ether 3:6–16; see also Mosiah 7:27; Alma 18:34; 22:12)

In another revelation received in December of 1830, the same doctrine is both affirmed and enlarged upon. It states that God possesses a body, and the creation of man in the image and likeness of God is explained in terms of procreation. "A genealogy was kept of the children of God", it says, "And this was the book of the generations of Adam". In continuing, it states that "God created man . . . *In the image of* ***his own body***" and then, after giving a genealogy of Adam's sons, who are likewise described as being born in Adam's image and after his likeness, it concludes by stating that "this is the genealogy of the sons of Adam, *who was* ***the son of God***".[1] Later, during the Nauvoo period, the Prophet began to expound upon this doctrine. "God the Father" was in a very literal sense, "Our Father in Heaven" he taught. Indeed not just in one sense, but in a dual capacity — both in the spirit and in the flesh, man was the offspring of God.[2]

While portraying God in such literally physical and human terms, it was only a matter of time before the Prophet would

[1] Moses 6:8–22

[2] (*Unpublished Revelations* 61:18) He even taught that as God's progeny, it was expected of us that we would some day become all that our Heavenly Father is, and that this was the ultimate purpose for which the Gospel had been given to man, that we might "become gods, even the sons of God." (D&C 76:58)

have to recognize that God was both male and female. You cannot say that we look like God without saying at the same time that He looks like us. And if God looks like us, you cannot escape the conclusion that there must be both male and female gods, for that is precisely what human beings are. It is only natural then that the designation "God the Father" would bring to mind questions regarding the existence of God our Heavenly Mother. This was the substance of the Prophet's revelation on Celestial marriage[3] — that belief in a Mother in Heaven is basic and essential to belief in a Father in Heaven, and in the Kingdom of God one does not exist independent of the other. In other words, the Prophet taught that God the Father is a married man, and that He and His wife (who is our Mother in Heaven) had literally peopled this Earth with their own offspring.

What is hard to understand is that even though we believe in a Heavenly Mother, still we never pray to Her. In fact there is no ritual in Mormon religion which involves Her worship, or even the acknowledgement of Her existence.[4] In attempting to answer the question, as to why this is so, some have conjectured that perhaps the Father did not wish to have our Mother profaned and therefore He has kept Her from us. But this answer has always seemed inadequate to me. It does not seem right that God would deny His children access to their Mother on the grounds of such a petty issue. I was surprised when I discovered that generally

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[3]D&C 132

[4]Without the doctrine of Adam-God as taught by President Brigham Young, there is no detailed doctrine of a Heavenly Mother in Mormon theology. Only in his teachings do we find concrete information about our Mother in Heaven, along with a knowledge of who She is and the role which She has played in the salvation of Her children. Indeed, through President Young's teachings we learn that our Heavenly Mother offered up her life as a sacrafice, in order to bring her children into a mortal probation, that they might be promoted into eternal progression as Gods. Independant of his teachings, all we know about our Heavenly Mother is that God the Father is married, and that His wife is our Mother in the spirit, and that some how she is also the mother of our flesh. No doubt, had the Prophet Joseph Smith lived longer, we would know more about Her, but through treachery, his life was cut short.

speaking this answer leads in the right direction — the only problem is that it does not go far enough to get to the real heart of the problem.

If we want to learn about our Mother in Heaven and Her absence in our religion, we must go back to the source of our cultural beginnings. That is where we will find our answer. We will find it buried in sacred history — we must pay a visit to Ancient Israel on the day of their transgression, for that is the source from whence the decree came.

The world did not always have a Father God who stood alone without His Mate. At the beginning of time there was a better day — a time when both the Father and our Mother, stood side by side in the sacred temple of religion. But their children became fallen, and finally even Israel transgressed — for she made of our Mother a harlot, and of Her worship a license for sin. On that day the curse of God fell on Israel. She was denied the Priesthood, and the secret of the Gods was taken from man. From that day on, the Father would stand alone — no image would be made to symbolize His person — no mate to stand at His side. The religion of our Mother vanished from Earth — and the Priestesshood (to which her daughters were rightful heirs) vanished with it. But we are getting ahead of our story, so let us back up and get a few things in perspective. Let the Bible come to life — let us remove the misty fog of past generations and see things as they really were. We cannot get our Mother in perspective without our Father at Her side. We need the whole religion as it originally was brought into our view.

THE JEWISH/CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

It is of course understood that traditional Jewish/Christian religion does not share with us our lofty ideals about Father and Mother. For more than a thousand years they have denied the physical essence of God. This alone would preclude the possability of God having a body, to say nothing of Him being

male or female. Regardless of gender as expressed in scriptural noun and pronoun usages, from their perspective God the Father is neither male or female. In fact, the Bible notwithstanding, in reality, the Father is not a person at all — at least not in terms that we can comprehend.

It goes without saying that all these theological differences lead to different interpretations of the Bible. This is especially true where it concerns the nature of the Godhead and the Gospel that was revealed to Adam and the Patriarchs. To be sure, it is generally conceded by Jews, "Christians" and Mormons, that the Patriarchs from Adam to Moses had the Gospel, but that is where the agreement ends. The Jews believe that the pure religion of Heaven was monotheism, and that this was the doctrine that was originally revealed to Adam and passed down to Moses. God can only be understood in abstract terms. First and foremost is the ridgid doctrine of philosophic monotheism — the idea that God is and can only be ONE — polytheism in any form is unthinkable. In the days of Moses, the children of Israel went into apostasy, and because of this it was necessary to again restore the Gospel in its original purity through the ten commandments and the Law of Moses. For the Jew then, the Law of Moses merely reestablished what God had already revealed to Adam and the Patriarchs.

In keeping with this, traditional "Christianity" would agree with the Jew, that monotheism was the original religion revealed by God to Adam, and that Moses restored what had already been revealed to the Patriarchs, but they do not believe that the Fulness of the Gospel was had on Earth until the advent of Christ, for Baptism and other teachings unique to Christianity do not appear in the Old Testament.

On the other hand, contrary to both Jew and "Christian", the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that the religion which was originally revealed to Adam and which passed down through the lineage of the Patriarchs was a pure form of Anthropomorphic Polytheism or more accurately expressed, Theomorphic

Polytheism.[5] According to the Prophet, the Gospel in its fulness was first given to Adam, and passed down through the lineage of the patriarchs, form Enoch to Noah to Abraham. Hense, according to the Prophet, the religion of the Patriarchs included Baptism, all the gifts of the Spirit, and the knowledge of Christ, as well as that of our Father and Mother in Heaven and all the coinciding ordinances of the Temple. It was not until the apostasy of Israel, during their sojourn with Moses in the wilderness, that the Fulness of this Gospel was first taken from the Earth. In other words, it was the Prophet's view that rather than restoring the Fulness of the Gospel as it was had by the Patriarchs, the Lord at this time took the Fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood out of their midst, *and with it **the***

[5]But the Polytheism of the Prophet was not in all respects the same as that believed in by the ancient Pagans, for he did not conceive of the gods as being in rivelry and at war and contention with one another. Quite to the contrary the Polytheism which was believed in by the Prophet was perfectly expressed in the last prayer of Jesus, as he knelt down in Gethsemane to pray for his people:

"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give **Eternal Life** to as many as thou hast given him. . . . . *I have glorified thee on the earth:* I have finished the work *which thou gavest me to do*. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. . . . . I pray for them . . . which thou hast given me: for they are thine. *And all mine are thine, and thine are mine*; and I am glorified in them. . . . Neither pray I for these alone but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee,* **that they also may be one in us**: . . . And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; ***that they may be one**, even **as we are one**: I in them, and thou in me, **that they may be made perfect in one***; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. . . . . And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:1–2, 4-6, 9–10, 20–24, 26)

knowledge of God, and left in the stead thereof the Aaronic Priesthood and a carnal law, commonly known as the Law of Moses. Thus, as far as the masses were concerned, the children of Israel remained in darkness, without the whole knowledge of God for thirteen centuries — from Moses to Christ.[6]

PARRELLELS BETWEEN MORMONISM AND PAGAN RELIGION

What is interesting is that notwithstanding the opposition of the Jewish/Christian community, still the historical record reveals that typical religion in the ancient world held major concepts in common with those of Joseph Smith. In fact the similarities are so striking, that many critics have claimed Mormonism is Pagan. Quite frankly, the parallels cannot be denied. Both Mormon and Pagan religion believe in many gods — Both believe in a God who possesses a physical body.[7] Both believe in a Father and Mother in Heaven, who literally procreated (rather than created) man in their own image, and after their own likeness.

The similarities between the pagan practice of ancestral worship and the Prophet's doctrine on God as set in the context of the Patriarchal order is another striking parallel, for in the mind of the Prophet not only was Eloheim the great ancestor of the human race, but we were also commanded to honor our earthly parents and other intermediate ancestors as well. Indeed, in accordance with the Prophet's doctrine, in the *celestial order of government*, all faithful parents who hold the Fulness of the

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[6]If this should prove to be true, then it would mean that the Book of Genesis (which is the record of the Patriarchs, who had the fulness of the Gospel) has been passed down for more than a millennium through a benighted generation, who were denied the knowledge of God. And this being the case, we ought to be honest enough to acknowledge that the Book of Genesis would be doctored and tainted in accordance with the doctrine of the new religion, as we cannot realisticly expect that a people would preserve that which they could not understand.

[7]D & C 130:22; *The Early History of Israel*, 146–147

Melchizedek Priesthood stand as God and Goddess to their own posterity.[8] What makes the connection here is that the Prophet believed that this form of government was to be established here on Earth, as well as in Eternity.

No doubt, admitting all this will only add to the clamor of the anti-Mormon crowd, but my reason for mentioning it is constructive, as it brings our minds to a sharp focus on the same issues as they relate to the religion of the Bible. Is it possible that the same doctrinal parallels which exist between Mormon and Pagan religion can also be found in the religion of ancient Israel. Did the religion of the Patriarchs and Prophets originate completely independent from their Pagan neighbors, or is it possible that the religion of the Hebrews and Pagans both had a common origin, and that they held major theological concepts and cultic rituals in common with each other. Could this have been the reason why the children of Israel were so often tempted by the idolatry of pagan religion — because there was not as great a distinction between them and their neighbors as we have formerly been led to believe.

Did early Hebrew religion conceive of God in physical human form? Did they believe in a literal Father and Mother in Heaven? Was monotheism really the original religion that was revealed to Adam and the Patriarchs, or was monotheism something which snuck in through the back door on some dark night, thousands of years later? And equally important — did Moses reestablish and perpetuate the same religion as was had by the Patriarchs — or did he as the Prophet said, make radical changes and go contrary to their religion and in fact outlaw and eradicate major portions of it, and establish in the stead thereof another gospel and religion based upon a lesser law. Of course we can agree that both Moses and the Patriarchs prayed to the same God, but that is not the question. The question is, did they

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[8](*TPJS* 323) For more on this see "Adoption — Law of the Kingdom — Forgotten Doctrine of Mormonism, Part 1", Published in *Doctrine of the Priesthood* Vol. 8: (April 1991) No. 4.

both have and perpetuate the same Religion, Priesthood and Ordinances.

And finally, is traditional Jewish/Christian theology in keeping with the Bible — or is it in its present form merely the end product of a long evolution which involves thousands of years of change?

These questions are basic to the restoration. It is only regretable that restrictions on time will not allow us to fully explore all the proof texts — we will therefore have to be satisfied with a general smattering of the subjects which have been named, and then proceed on with the main focus being upon the subject of the Hebrew Goddess.

WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES AND THE FINDINGS OF ARCHEOLOGY

In coming to grips with these questions, it is important to recognize at the outset that the Bible teaches that originally all cultures had a common origin in Adam, to whom God first revealed Himself. It also teaches that this same religion and culture which God revealed to Adam was passed on down through the Patriarchs to the time of the tower of Babel, when because of wickedness, the Lord confounded the language of the people, and divided them up into different nations. We can only conjecture that after this the same culture continued among all peoples, with the difference that they all spoke a different language. Hence, they might know God by different names, but their concepts of Him would be basically the same. This is not to deny that the Adamic religion became perverted, but even in apostasy, you would expect that it would retain the basic seeds of its beginnings.

The fact that the historical record vindicates this scenario, is to say the least, a boon for the Mormon position. Archaeological excavations have revealed that notwithstanding the many

languages and cultures which existed in the ancient Near East, their ideas about God and religion were incredibly alike — and this rule of thumb does not altogether except the Hebrews. The gods of the Pagans went by different names, but for the most part, the roles which they played all seemed to follow a basic pattern.[9] What is significant here is that anthropomorphic polytheism along with belief in a Father and Mother in Heaven was one of the most fundamental beliefs. Not only so, but it was a belief which prevailed from the time of Adam to Christ, and that too, in both Pagan and Hebrew religion. This is in sharp contrast to the religion of abstract monotheism, which as scholars have discovered, did not come into existence until the time of the Greek philosophers who first invented it. In fact abstract monotheism is entirely foreign to the Bible — even in Isaiah, there is plenty that remains from the old religion of the Patriarchs.[10]

In this respect archeology has been very friendly to the teachings of Joseph Smith, and at the same time, completely devastating to traditional Jewish/Christian religion. In fact Joseph's doctrine fits in so smooth with what has been discovered that it leads one to exclaim he was a Prophet of God. Not only are his teachings supported by Archeology, but they are also supported by the Bible itself,[11] and this too, is in accordance with the judgment of present day Jewish and Christian scholars.[12]

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[9]*The Hebrew Goddess* 20, 26

[10]See for example Isaiah 14:12–16; Jude 6; 1 Kings 22:19–24.

[11]Even the Bible states in certain terms that the religion of the Patriarchs before the flood was polytheistic. (Joshua 24:15)

[12]Consider the following statement which was published in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*:: "Biblical historiography presents the theory that God revealed Himself successively to Adam, Noah, Abraham and his descendants, and finally to Moses. Monotheism was thus made known to the human race in general and to Israel in particular from the very beginning. Not ignorance but perverseness led to the recognition of other gods, necessitating the sending of the Prophets to reemphasize the teachings of Moses and the facts of the earlier revelation. Contrary to this view, the modern critical school regards monotheism as the

Believe it or not, scholars coming from both the Jewish and Christian camp have identified the religion of Abraham as one and the same with that of his Pagan neighbors. This is not to deny that there were differences, but the likeness between the religion of the Patriarchs as described in Genesis and that of the Cannanites is so close that for archaeologists and scholars alike, and even at times for ancient Israel, the difference is hard to recognize.[13] Even their cultic rituals were basically the same.[14] Both the Hebrews and the Cannanites practiced circumcision, and animal sacrifice, and the three major holidays which were

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final outcome of a long process of religious evolution, basing its hypothesis upon certain data discovered in the Biblical books as well as upon the analogy presented by Israel"s historical development to that of other Semetic groups . . . .

"The primitive religion of Israel and the God-concept therein attained reflected the common primitive Semitic religious ideas, which, though modified in Biblical times, and even largely eliminated, have left their traces in the theological doctrines of the Israel of later days. Renan's theory, formulated in his "Precis et Systeme Compare des Languages Semitiques" (1859), ascribing to the semites a monotheistic instinct, has been abandoned because it was found to be in conflict with facts. As far as epigraphic material, traditions, and folk-lore throw light on the question, the semites are shown to be of polytheistic leanings."

This same article goes on to say that anciently semites thought of themselves as having "descended from its god, which it met and entertained at the sacramental meal" and that it was with this god that "it maintained the blood covenant." (*The Jewish Encyclopedia* 6:13)

This statement was published at the turn of the century. Since then additional material confirming the same sentiments has continued to pour in.

[13]There are a few who would still argue that it was the influence of Cannan on Israel after Moses that continued to lead Israel into idolatry, but the great bulk of evidence would show to the contrary. The truth of the matter is that it was the Patriarchs who identified themselves with the religion of Cannan in the first place — hense, the natural inclination of their offspring to perpetuate the religion of their forefathers. And this being the case, rather than viewing the later Prophets as calling Israel to repentance for apostasy from the religion of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we are forced to view them as reformers, who were engaged in a struggle to erradicate an old religion and to establish in the stead thereof a new one — at least in many instances this is the case.

[14]*Hebrew Goddess* 17; *Early History of Israel* 283–287

celebrated in Israel (i.e. the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of the Ingathering and the Feast of the Tabernacles) all have their parallels with Cannanite celebrations.[15] These parallels are easily recognized, not only in the nature and content of the celebration, but they were also celebrated at the same time of year.

Even the creation story as given in Genesis has strong parallels to other creation stories which were common in the ancient Near East.[16] These theogonys were all polytheistic in nature, and among the many parallels, they each specify the creation as taking place in seven days. There was also a Pagan account of the story of Noah and the flood, and it has been determined that both the Babylonian and Biblical account have a common origin.[17] Another area of agreement between Hebrew and Cannanite religion is their doctrine on the Godhead, for both conceived of God as an exalted man and they both used the same phraseology and metaphors to describe Him. For example in the Bible, Yahavah is refered to as a "Man of War" and is described riding upon the clouds, and in the lightning and thundar, and so also was Baal described in Cannanite texts.

All this argues hard for the idea that all cultures did have a common origin in Adam, and the story of the Tower of Babel is a good biblical explanation for the many religious similarities which existed in a world so filled with diversity. In other words the Bible explains it as the common thread of tradition going back to the beginning of time, when the heavenly doctrine was first revealed to man in the Adamic religion.

The evidence indicates that when Abraham emigrated to Canaan, he discovered there a dominant religion which was so similar to his own that ultimately he identified himself with it.

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[15] *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 2:676

[16] See *The Babylonian Genesis*, by Alexander Heidel, 2nd edition, 1951, published by The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

[17] See *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, by Alexander Heidel, 2nd edition 1949, published by The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

This religion seemed to prevail in nearly all the places where Abraham settled. There were altars in Beer-sheba, in Shechem, in Beer-lahai-roi and at Bethel. Even in Jerusalem this same religion flourished under the leadership of Melchizedek, who was at one and the same time the leading High Priest over of the Church and the King over the city state of Jerusalem.

The Bible together with the archeological record both show with overwhelming evidence, that the Religion of the Patriarchs was a form of Anthropomorphic or Theomorphic Polytheism. It contained within it elements of ancestral worship[18] and included belief in a Father and Mother in Heaven, both of whom were thought of as possessing physical bodies as tangable as mans. The understanding was that there were many gods, and these gods were thought of as humans who possessed physical bodies just like us.[19] The difference was that the gods were immortal,

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[18]*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 2:673

[19]The fact that this is so is born out in many places throughout the New and Old Testament. From Genesis to Revelations, God is presented in all the person, form and likensss of a man, and throughout the Bible no definition to the contrary is ever given. The stage for this doctrine is clearly set in the first chapter of the Bible where it describes the theomorphic creation of man in the "image" and "likness" of God. The word "image" is translated from the Hebrew word "tselem" and its obvious meaning is clearly demonstrated in the seventeen different passages where it occures throughout the Old Testament.

Its first five occures in the Old Testament can be found in Genesis Chapter 1 verses 26 and 27; chapter 5 verse 3 and chapter 9 verse 6. With only one exception, in all these it is consistently used to describe the resemblence or "likensss" between God and man. The one exception is found in chapter 5 verse 3 where it is used to describe the resemblance between father and son in the case of Adam and Seth. These alone are sufficient to demonstrate the obvious idea of physical shape and form which is intended to be conveyed in the word "tselem". But for those who remain unconvinced we will proceed on to the other passages. With the exception of one passage, in all of the twelve remaining instances where "tselem" occures in the Old Testament, it is used to refer to an image as in the case of idolatry, of which the following passages are a sample:

"destroy all their molten images," Num 33:52
"images of your emerods, and images of your mice" 1 Sam 6:5

"the images of their emerods." 1 Sam 6:11
"his images brake they in pieces" 2 Kings 11:18
"and brake his altars and his images" 2 Chron 23:17
"thou shalt despise their image." Psa 73:20
"but they made the images of their abominations" Ezek 7:20
"madest to thyself images of men," Ezek 16:17
"the images of the Chaldeans" Eze 23:14
"Moloch and Chiun your images," Amos 5:26

In all of these cases the idea of "shape" or "form" as it is intended to be understood in the word "tselem" is emphatically stated in the context of its use. To be sure, it is expected that there is a physical resemblance between an idolatrous image and the god which it was made to represent. And just the same, so also does the Genesis account of the creation of man in the "likeness" and "image of God" convey the idea of a mirror-image relationship between man and his creator. The parallellism between these two ideas was exploited in early Jewish writings which date back to the time of Christ. First God made all the angels in heaven including Satan. Finally he made an image in His own form and likeness in the person of Adam and commanded all the angels in Heaven to bow down and worship the image. But Satan refused, saying that he was created first, and that Adam ought to worship him. It was this rebellion which caused Satan to be cast out of Heaven. (See the Books of Adam and Eve chapters 12–17, as published in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, Vol. 2 p. 137)

The one remaining passage in which "tselem" occures is found in Psalms chapter 39 verse 6 or 7 as the case might be, depending on whether in the original Hebrew or English. In the King James translation of this passage, "tselem" is translated into the words "in a vain shew", with an alternate translation indicated in the margin as "an image". In the Jerusalem translation it is rendered "shadow":

"each man that stands on earth is only a puff of wind,
"every man that walks, only a shadow,"

In order to tone down the obvious anthropomorphic implication in the word "tselem" as used to describe the creation of man, some have argued that it was origionally derived from an unused root which means "to shade" or "shadow". All this is doubtful, but whether true or no, still their problem remains unsolved. All you need to do is stand against a wall in front of a light, and it immediately becomes apparent that a shadow is cast from the image of its maker and that it represents a true reflection of the same — hense it does not change the meaning at all to describe the creation of man as the shadow of God.

Some of the more candid scholars have admitted the obvious meaning of man being created in the image and likeness of God. For example, *The Interpreter's Commentary of the Bible* in commenting on Genesis 1:27 states that "Those religious conceptions which first come into sight at primitive levels may be the root of greater adult faith; and the greatness of developed faith must not be disparaged because its origin was in crude ideas. That is the double truth which emerges from this verse, and from the Exeg. on it. It is a truth which presents itself repeatedly in these first chapters of Genesis, and it is one that needs to be brought home often to our recognition — for we may not readily accept it. Our tendency may be to suppose that high beliefs lose their dignity if their origins are humble." (Vol 1:484)

If it is ironic, still it is only consistant with life, that what may seem "crude" to one is beautiful to another, for so the creation of man in the image and likeness of God appears to me. Nothing makes my soul swell with more joy than the knowledge that myself and my other brothers and sisters are the sons and daughters of God, and that if faithful we will become joint heirs with Jesus, to inherit all that our Heavenly Father has. I guess that the difference is determined in the answer to the question, of whether at the heart of your religious faith is a belief in abstract philosophy as established by the Greek philosophers or an abiding faith in the original Hebrew/Christian doctrine.

It is interesting that in another section of the same comentary, it attempts to credit Babalonian mythology as the ultimate source for the idea that God made man in His own image:

"The idea of man being created in the image of God is probably dependent on Babylonian mythology. . . . In the mind of P, there can be little doubt, bodily form was to some extent at any rate involved in the idea of the divine image; cf. the numerous references in the O.T. to God's hands, feet, mouth, etc. (e.g., Pss. 119:73; 33:6; Isa. 60:13; Zech. 14:4, to cite only late passages). The incorporeality of God was too abstract a thought for an Israelite even of the fifth century (cf. Gunkel, Genesis, p. 112) . . . . And in the present passage P does not represent God as saying, "Let us make man in my image," but in our image — the image of us, the divine beings. A sentence of Skinner's may be quoted, "That P retained the idea {of a heavenly council} in spite of his silence as to the existence of angels is due to the fact that it was decidedly less anthropomorphic than the statement that man was made in the image of the one incomparable Deity" (Genesis, p. 31).

"In view of the fact, however, that in Hebrew thought the body was a part of the whole man and was necessary to his complete being, and that it was furthermore the outward manifestation of the reality of which it was a part, the representation that man was made in the image of God meant much more than that man looked like God or like the divine beings which formed his retinue. The image included likeness to them in spiritual powers — the power of

thought, the power of communication, the power of self transcendence. No doubt these concepts remained to some extent inarticulate in the author's mind; nevertheless they were there." (*The Interpreter's Bible* Vol 1:484–485)

It is obvious from the above that the authors recognize the "crude" ideas of the patriarchs for what they were — however they believe that the currant ideas about God are more lofty, than the primitive patriarchs, and this too, notwithstanding the fact that it was the Patriarchs who knew God. Indeed, in accordance with these scholars, we must believe that the Patriarchs were dependant upon Babylonian mythology for the knowledge of God and mans relationship to him!

In another section of the same Commentary still more confessions are made:

"The Anthropomorphism of God. — The Old Testament makes no attempt to define God's being. Throughout he is simply depicted as a person by means of a free and frank use of anthropomorphic language. To be sure, there are vairious levels of anthropomorphism; a difference exists between the simple story form of Gen. 2–3 and the more abstract and theologically self-conscious presentation of Gen. 1 and Ezekiel. Yet this difference is actually a minor one of degree. In general, God is depicted as possessing practically all the characteristics of a human being, including bodily form and personality, though excluding sex.

In the past there has been a tendency to assume that this aspect of the Old Testament indicates a fairly primitive level of religious conception; growth to a "higher" level of thought, it has been claimed, came with the increasing emphasis on the spirituality of God. This is an exceedingly doubtful assumption. Nowhere in the Bible can there be said to be a doctrine of God's spirituality, unless one were to except John 4:24. The spirit of God is not to be identified with God himself. The latter is conceived in personal, even corporeal terms, and perhaps the most vivid example and the climax of this anthropomorphism is to be found in the doctrine of the Incarnation. In pp. 358–59 something of the significance of this vocabulary drawn from human analogy was suggested. God is not to be depicted by a mixture of metaphors drawn from nature as in polytheism; he is not conceived as an abstract idea or principle; he cannot be apprehended primarily by means of an undefined analogy drawn from wind or breath (hence "spirit"). He is a living, active, forceful personality whom men can meet, know, and worship, before whom they can bow in confession of sin and not be broken as before an inexorable law of fate, but in whom there is both justice and forgiveness." (*The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 1:362–63)

It is interesting that the *Anchor Bible*, which is by and large one of the most scholarly translations and commentaries of the Bible ever produced — yet in its commentary on Genesis 1:26–28, it entirely side steps and passes over the subject of man being made in the image of God without so much as even mentioning it. In fairness to the whole commentary and translation, each book

while we of course are not. This did not mean that the gods could not die through some diabolical plot or unforeseen accident. The gods could be killed just as Jesus was, but they did not grow old, and did not therefore have to die as mortals do. In this sense then, to the Patriarchs, the gods were thought of in the same light as we conceive of mortals who have passed through death and the resurrection — in other words, deity was equated with immortality and when mortals obtain immortality, they become gods.[20]

Among the many gods, there were those who were good and those who were evil. Those who were evil were thought of in the same light as we conceive of Satan and the evil spirits, while those who were good were thought of just as we conceive of the Father and the Son, along with the many angels who surround them. If all this sounds familiar, it is because we have inherited our religion from the Patriarchs. The only difference is that with the coming of philosophic monotheism, the lesser gods were demoted to the rank of angels, while deity was strictly reserved for the head God.

To the Patriarchs, the gods were many, but their loyalties centered in the supreme God whose name was El. El was "the father of the gods and the 'father of men', the 'creator of created things', the 'father of years'." He was conceived of "as an old man with a white beard. He was 'wise', 'benevolent' and 'merciful'.[21] He was also married and His wifes' name was

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in the Bible was done by a different author, and it is only regretable that the Jewish author of the Genesis translation and commentary was so lacking in integrity that he refused even to so much as mention this and other issues which were challenging to his religious faith.

[20]This is the essence of the story of the fall of Adam and Eve. Knowledge, immortality and the power of procreation are set forth as the great primary requisites for deification, and through the acquisition of these, for a short time man became "as the gods" (Gen 3:5, 22). But their jubilee was only short lived, for upon discovering their transgression, the Lord God drove them out of Eden, lest they should partake of the "Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever" (Gen 3:22–24)

[21]*Early History of Israel* 147

Asherah,[22] and together they ruled supreme among the gods. In the primordial beginning, El and Asherah begat seventy divine sons and daughters and it was these who became the lesser gods that filled the pantheon.[23] Essentially then, the whole pantheon was a patriarchal order, composed of the sons and daughters of two heavenly parents who were thought of as God the Father and God the Mother — El and Asherah. It is significant that El and Asherah were thought of in the same light as Eloheim and wife are in Mormon theology, and as it turns out this is with good reason, for Eloheim is the plural expression of the divine name El, and throughout the Old Testament, El and Eloheim alternate interchangeably as different names for the same great God.

In accordance with Patriarchal religion, the creation of man in the image and likeness of God as described in Genesis was originally understood in terms of Procreation. That this is so is still manifest in the fifth chapter of Genesis where the same words, "image" and "likeness" are used to describe the birth of Seth and the resemblance which he bore to his father Adam. On two different occasions the New Testament perpetuates this same tradition — first in the book of Luke where it states that Adam was the son of God just as Seth was the son of Adam, and then again in Acts chapter 17, where it is declared that "we are the offspring of God". All this fits in perfectly with the old patriarchal religion, for not only was El declared to be the Father of all the gods in Heaven, He was also believed to be the Father of all mankind on Earth.

THE ADAMIC RELIGION AND THE ANCIENT PRACTICE OF IDOLATRY

In ancient Cannanite texts it is attested that El and Asherah worship was associated with images or idols and the Bible

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[22] *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 2:675–676

[23] *The Early History of Israel*, 147

indicates that the Patriarchs made use of these in their cultic rituals. Now before any of you jump out of your skin, you should realize that there was more than one form of Idolatry, and the form to which the Patriarchs subscribed was not the worship of a stone or a carved image under the delusion that it was God. They did not worship the image any more than we worship the Christus statue in the visitors center or the Catholics the statue of Marry.[24] The images used by the Patriarchs and Prophets during the early period of the Old Testament were thought of in the same way that the Latter-day Saints today view the Temple, and in the same way that ancient Israel thought of the Arch of the Covenant or the Temple of Soloman. To be sure, both the Tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple were composed of wood and stone, and both were made by human hands. But what made them special was the fact that they were dedicated by the Priesthood with the idea in view that God's Spirit would rest down upon the tabernacle or temple and thereby possess it. Hence the tabernacle and the temple became a symbol for Gods presence.[25] The Priest who wished to commune with the Lord would go into the temple or tabernacle and enter the Holy of Holies, in the anticipation that they would be standing in the presence of God.

The crowning touch in ancient temples as had under the old Adamic religion was an image of God the Father and God the Mother sculptured in the round, and set in the Holy of Holies to symbolize God's presence. The images would be dedicated by

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[24]Idolatry as defined in the Bible can be understood in any one of three different ways: Viz. Worship of an alien god whether with or without the use of an image — Worship of the true God through the use of an image — or any inapropriate worship of God wheather with or without the use of an image.

In the process of their polemics the Old Testament Prophets indulged in name calling by misrepresenting the Idolatry of Cannan to be fetish.

The form of Idolatry which was practiced by the Patriarchs is still manifest in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapter of Judges. Remember also the story of Racheal taking her fathers images, as well as the fact that Abraham's father practiced idolatry.

[25]*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 2:675

the Power of the Priesthood with a prayer that Gods Spirit would rest down upon them and thereby possess them. As such they became a sacred symbol of Gods presence, before which the priest or priestess could bow down in humble reverence and worship or petition the Lord.

Nevertheless in accordance with ancient thought, Gods Spirit was not limited to one image or to one temple, or tabernacle, and destruction of the image, temple or tabernacle, did not constitute the destruction of God. So the image was not thought of as God Himself, but rather as the symbol of His presence.

At the time of Moses for the first time in the History of the world, the use of an image was baned from the cultic rituals of the Priesthood.[26] This was because of the transgression of Israel, and because of this we do not have images in our temples today. Nevertheless, still we have their equivalent. Situated in the window of the Holy of Holies in the Salt Lake Temple, is a stained glass depiction of the first vision, and the reason for its being placed there is obvious — it is a symbol of God's presence.

Elaborate temples and colossal images sculptured in the round were beautiful and awe inspiring, but they were reserved for highly developed civilizations who had the means and artisans to construct them. For wandering nomads such as the Patriarchs, it was necessary to improvise in accordance with their means. In the case of the Patriarchs, it was customary to set up a sacred stone pillar near a sacred tree and to consecrate it with oil. Often this would be in some high place on a hill or in the mountains. The stone pillar was to symbolize the presence of the Father God, El, and it is believed by many that these sacred stones were the original meaning behind such divine names as

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[26] *Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* states that "The ban on images [as given by Moses in the ten commandments] was a new concept in the ancient E[ast], even producing a great struggle among the people of Israel, who continually returned to image worship" (*Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* 3:245)

"the Stone of Israel", or "The Rock of Jacob".[27] On the other hand, the sacred tree was to symbolize the presence of El's wife and our Mother, Asherah. Another method of depicting Asherah was to carve the figure of a woman in a log and plant it upright in the ground like an Indian totem pole.[28] Usually it would be planted under a large spreading leafy tree or in a grove of trees, where both the sacred stone and the sacred tree or pole would stand side by side.

It is regrettable that most of the references to sacred trees have been obscured in the King James translation. This is because the King James version was based on the Masoretic Text which was tampered with by Jewish interpreters in an effort to remove the implication of Asherah worship. However, other Old Testament manuscripts have survived, and these consistently show that sacred trees formed a part of Patriarchal religion, and this information is now available in some of the newer translations of the Bible. One example of this is found in the beginning of the eighteenth chapter of Genesis. The King James translation says that "the Lord appeared unto [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre". But the Jerusalem Bible translation says that "Yahweh appeared to him at the Oak of Mamre"[29] (Genesis 18:1).

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[27] *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 2:677

[28] Dr Ralph Patai writes that "While it is not easy to reach a definite conclusion as to the physical shape in which Asherah was represented among the Hebrews, a careful perusal of the numerous Biblical references to the "Asherah" seems to indicate that they were carved wooden images which were set up by implanting their base into the ground." In continuing Patai states that: "the word Asherah in Biblical usage can . . . refer either to the goddes herself or to her image." (*The Hebrew Goddess* 22, see also footnote 9, p. 279)

[29] Be it remembered that the Bible as we have it today has passed down through thirteen centuries of the Law of Moses, wherein the people were deprived of the whole knowledge of God, and consequently, much of what once was has been removed from the text — there are literally thousands of changes. Between the Masoretic Text, the Septuegent and the Samaritan Bible there are 6000 variations, and many of these reflect a change in theological thinking, wherein Judahism attempted to eradicate the old polytheistic religion of Israel,

Fortunately, even in the King James translation a vestage of Asherah worship as practiced by the Patriarchs still remains. It is found in the twenty first chapter of Genesis, where it is stated that Abraham planted an grove, and called upon Jehovah the Everlasting El.[30]

A FERTILITY RELIGION

Anciently to a Hebrew woman fertility was considered as the greatest blessing from the Lord, and to be baren was to be cursed. Even in the creation, the first law of Heaven as decreed by God was to "multiply and replenish the Earth". Bearing this

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and to dress or cloak their new religion of monotheism more in accordance with the popular philosophy of the Greeks.

[30](Gen 21:33) In refering to this passage, the Encyclopedia Judiaca states that: "the planting of a tree for the service of God was practiced by Abraham (Gen 21:33)." In continuing it states that: "This form of worship was later proscribed by Deuteronomy (16:21) the *mazzevot* and the planting of trees for the cult of God was widely in use during the time of the Monarchy (1 Kings 14:15, 23; 11 Kings 17:10; 23:14). The "brazen serpent" seems also to fall in this group (see 11 Kings 18:4)." (*Encyclopedia Judiaca* 8:1228)

In addition to this, some scholars believe that "an invocation of Asherah may have been contained in the original from of the exclamation made by Leah at the birth of Zilph's son, whom she named Asher." (*Hebrew Goddess* 23, see also note 15, p. 280)

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Vol 2:676 makes the following statement: "The narrative of Gideon's destruction of the fertility shrine of Ophrah (Judg. 6:25ff) indicates that the Asherah was by the altar of Baal, and the fact that Gideon burnt his offering to Yahweh with the Asherah which he had cut down indicates that it was of wood. The Hebrew text mentions literally [Hebrew word] , "the trees of the Asherah," and this is probably the source of the belief that the Asherah was a grove. We are not bound, however, to render the Hebrew word {Hebrew word] so literally, and it may signify simply "wood." A single object seems to be denoted — either a natural tree or a wooden pole as a stylized tree — the term "Ahserah" either signifying its "erect" position or being the name of the Canaanite mother-goddess whom it symbolized as the repository of fruitfulness. The association of the mother-goddess with a tree, moreover, may have been suggested by primitive Semitic animism"

in mind the importance of Asherah worship to the Patriarchs and their wives is easy to understand, for it was believed among Hebrews that Asherah "promoted fertility in women and facilitated childbirth."[31] Asherah was the wife of El and the primordial mother of all gods and men and all this came about through the power of procreation. In the most perfect sense of the word Asherah and El were the Fountain of Life and the ultimate symbol thereof.

It is in the nature of mortality, that when placed in the wrong hands, that which would otherwise be good can be made into evil. This is especially so in the case of Asherah worship. There is a lot of shocking information which might be given on this, but suffice it to say that the worship of Asherah became corrupt. What was origionally intended to be reserved for the marriage bed began to be passed out indiscriminately in public affairs which were nothing less than a communal sex orgie. Images to Asherah were errected all over the hill country, almost as it were under every green tree, and whole communities would go up to these alters and have an orgie.[32] In essance, Asherah was made out to be a harlot and Her worship became license to commit whoredom.

It is in this area that there was a great distinction between the religion of the Patriarchs and that of the Cannanites. The difference was not in the idea that they prayed to a different God, for they did not. Nor was the difference to be found in the practice of their rituals. The great distinction between the religion of the Patriarchs and that of their neighbors was their belief in the basic morality of God. It was a belief in a certain moral code of right and wrong which God had given to His

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[31] *The Hebrew Goddess* 23

[32] *Dr. Ralph Patai writes:* "From the story told in the Book of Judges about Godeon, who lived in the 12th century B.C., we learn that the Asherah worship in those early days was a communal or public affair." (*The Hebrew Goddess* 22)

children, but which through varying degrees of degeneration, other cultures had lost sight of.[33]

APOSTASY IN CANAAN

During the 400 years that passed between the Patriarchs and the time of Moses, the land of Cannan went through several signifigant religious changes. Probably the most important of these is found in the fact that an alien Storm God by the name of Baal Haddu was imported into Cannan and ultimately succeeded

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[33]Dr. Ralph Patai writes that "the difference between Yahweh and other gods lay not in ritual, but in the ideology and morality, which was developed in his name by the Hebrew prophets." (*The Hebrew Goddess* 24)

We should not suppose that this corruption or general loss of morality among other cultures did not also exist in Abraham's sojourn in Canaan — indeed, even his his day there was Sodom and Gomorah.

It might be added to this that fidelity to the marriage covenant, wherein the sexual act is restricted to the marriage bed is both fundamental and essential to the patriarchal order of religion as had in ancient Israel, as also in any other patriarchal society. In this respect the women have the advantage over the men. No matter what a woman does, no matter how many men she may sleep with, still she is always in the position to know who her children are, but this is not the case with a man. If a man does not know that his wife has been true to him, then he does not know who his children are, and ultimately, if he does not know who his children are, then he does not have any. In this type of situating, more often than not, the culture will swing to that of a matriarchal order where the female will play the dominant role, because the children will be raised as the possession of the mother, and without a father. In this case the inheritance, if any, will be received through the mother, and both sons and daughters will look to their mother for counsel and guidance, while the men will live alone and without posterity or family, other than their own mothers. It is in view of this fact that we can begin to understand why rampant sexual immorality becomes the death blow to any Patriarchal society. In other words, if sex is not restricted to the marriage bed then there is no marriage, and if there is no marriage, men end up alone without posterity. They might do stud service, but the children become the possession of the mother who raises them, and the family does not include the father, because his identity is not known. Hense the disdainful view which is held towards a Bastard in Patriarchal society.

in displacing El and becoming the ruling god of the pantheon.[34] There is no reference to him in Genesis, but by the time of Moses the Baal cult flourished in Cannan. He is first mentioned in the Book of Numbers (Num 22:41), where his worship was associated with sex orgies.

Origionally Baal was the son of Dagon, but once his cult succeeded in becoming strong he was written into the mythologies as though he was one of El's sons.[35] Through trickery, intimidation and treachery he finally succeded in gaining a thrown, and ultimately became the leading god in the pantheon, while El faded into the background. Finally El even lost Asherah to Baal, who took her for his wife. Thus all over the hill country in Cannan, there were stone pillars errected to Baal with an image of Asherah standing at his side, and all the communities in Cannan would go up to these and in the process of worshiping Asherah and Baal commit whoredom.[36] This is what the children of Israel found when they entered Cannan under Joshuah, and the Lord said they were ripe for destruction — they had turned away from the true God and made of their mother a harlot.

THE GOD OF MOSES AND ABRAHAM

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[34]One scholar wrote a Dissertation in which he argued that in Cannanite mythology, Baal succeeded in casterating El and then usurped His thrown, just as Zeus did his father Chronos in Greek mythology. (See *The Conflict Between El and Baal in Canaanite Religion*, by Ulf Oldenburg, 1969) Since then, certain problems have been pointed out with this thesis, among them being that there is no hard evidence to show that El was casterated. However, by no means does this in itself deny the whole of his contention.

[35]*The Early History of Israel*, 147–148

[36]Roland De Vaux, who was a conservative Catholic scholar, referred to El and Asherah as a "respectable divine couple" and then in speaking of Baal, he refers to him as an "unruly" "young god". (*The Early History of Israel* 147) One thing is for sure, people tend to project onto God their own concept of nobility, and when they become degenerate it only follows that they will begin to conceive of God in degenerate terms.

When God first appeared to Moses in the deseret He identified Himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". In continuing, the Lord instructed Moses to go down into Egypt and tell the children of Israel that "Yahweh the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" had sent him to them. (Exodus 3:3:4–6, 13–15)

In another passage the Lord told Moses that His name was "Yahweh", but in explaining further He stated that in the past He had manifest himself "unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob" "by the name of El Shaddai" and that He did not make himself known to them by the name of "Yahweh" (Exodus 6:2–3) The substance of what the Lord has said here is that Yahweh was a new name for God and that the Patriarchs had not known God by that name, but instead that they had known him by the name of El Shaddai. What these verses do is establish a continuity between the God of Moses and the God of the Patriarchs, by explaining that Yahweh and El Shaddai are simply two different names that refer to the same God. But this notwithstanding, as we shall see, ultimately there ends up being a new law given and a new religion established, and much of the old religion of the Patriarchs is outlawed.

THE GOLDEN CALF

It has already been stated that the God El was thought of as an exalted man. Still in both Israelite and Cannanite religion, El's cultic symbol was the bull. Even in the Bible God is referred to as the "Bull of Jacob".[37] Many scholars have argued that the symbol of a bull was intended to signify El's prolific powers as

[37]The King James translation renders it "the Mighty One of Jacob (Gen 49:24) but numerous scholars have argued that a correct translation would read "the Bull of Jacob" (*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. 1:245).

the great procreator of all gods and men.[38] In other words the basic idea was that of a fertility symbol, which took the form of a copulating bull. It is significant that after Baal usurped El's throne, he also took on this same royal symbol. Sometimes he was portrayed standing on a bull, and at other times he was depicted with a helmet on, which had horns coming out of each side.[39]

The evidence indicates that a symbol for the jpresence of Yahweh/El was the intended meaning of the Golden Calf[40] which was constructed by the children of Israel in the deseret.[41]

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[38]*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 2:675

[39]*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 2:674

[40]"The word calf does not preclude the figure of a mature ox (Psa 106:20)" (*The Interpreter's Bible* 1:1065)

[41]The *Encyclopedia Judiaca* makes the following ststement: "The rabbis report that the golden calf was made as a replica of the bull in the divine throne. This tradition corresponds to the religious ideas current at that time in the Near East. Reference to the 'heavenly bull' is found in very ancient Egytian sources. The bull was considered to be the seat of different gods in Egypt, Babylonia, and Aram (Wainwright, in bibl.). In Israelite tradition the bull formed part of the divine throne. In order that God should make His glory dwell among them, they manufactured a bull, a replica of the divine throne or "heavenly bull,' so that God would make His spirit dwell in the calf, His earthly throne, and thereby fully identify with it. They in turn, by having possession of the idol, would in fact have a God in their midst." (*Encyclopedia Judiaca* 8:1229)

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible states: "[{Hebrew word} (Exod. 32:4), molten calf; [Hebrew Word] (1 Kings 12:28), golden calves]. a representation of a young bull (translation "calf" is misleading; see Ps. 106:19–20), perhaps made of wood and overlaid with gold, serving either as an image of Yahweh or as his pedestal or throne. Living bulls had a prominent place in the cultic practices of various regions of ancient Egypt. The bull appears in the art and the religious texts of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Phoenicia, and Syria. The gods of Syria in particular are frequently represented standing upon a bull. . . . . If . . . the bulls of Bethel and Dan represented pedestals or thrones upon which the invisible Yahweh was understood to be enthroned, then these bulls had virtually the same meaning as did the Ark of the covenant. On this hypothesis, the tradition of the golden calf made in the wilderness is illuminated. Just as the ark was most probably a portable throne-seat for the invisible Yahweh, representing his active presence and power particularly in time of battle (Num. 10:35–36), so also the young bull may have been Exod. 32 would contain, on

The same is also true of the other two calves which were built later in the Northern Kingdom by Jeroboam, and set up in Dan and at Bethel.[42] In all three cases the scriptures clearly state that in the mind of those who constructed them, the image was built to Yahweh/El, the true God of Israel. In speaking with reference to the Golden Calf, it states "'Here is your God, Israel' . . .'who brought you out of the land of Egypt!'"[43] The idea that the calf was built to symbolize the presence of Yahweh/El is confirmed again by Aaron in the following verse: "'Tomorrow' he said 'will be a feast in honour of Yahweh.'"[44] *The Interpreters Commentary* states that this feast "in honor of Yahweh" was for the purpose of dedicating the image.[45]

It is my opinion that the real cause for offense on this occasion is to be found in the nature of the celebration which they held the next day in honor of Yahweh/El. To be sure it was the image which inspired their transgression, but it was what Moses found them doing when he came down from the mount which was so abhorrent. The scriptures tell us that after they had offered sacrifices, "then all the people sat down to eat and drink, and afterwards got up to amuse themselves."[46]

It is this terse comment on the end which wants looking into. They "go up to amuse themselves." Another version reads they "got up to indulge in revelry."[47] The Septuagint suggests that they were having a sex orgie, and most scholars and commentaries agree that this is the case. Imagine it, the whole nation of Israel in one massive orgie. All thousands and

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this view, a rival tradition of those of the ark and of the tent of meeting, traditions which were originally associated with particular tribes or tribal groups, perhaps for centuries." (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 1:488)

[42] 1 Kings 12:28–30; 2 Kings 10:29–32

[43] *Jerusalem Bible* Ex 32:4–5; 1 Kings 12:28–30

[44] *Jerusalem Bi ble,* Exodus 32:4–5

[45] *The Interpreter's Bible* 1:1065

[46] *Jerusalem Bible,* Exodus 32:6

[47] *New International Version,* Ex 32:6

thousands of them! And this was how they honored Yahweh/El!! What possibly could they have been thinking!

There was no mention of the presence of Asherah at the festival, but you can bet her image was there, for in the mind of ancient Israel Yehweh/El and Asherah were a pair — they went together — and besides, one without the other just would not do for an orgie.

Moses response to what he found taking place as he descended the mount is found in the book of Exodus: "'Who is for Yahweh? [come] To me!' he called out. "And all the sons of Levi rallied to him. And he said to them, 'This is the message of Yahweh, the God of Israel, "Gird on your sword, every man of you, and quarter the camp from gate to gate, killing one his brother, another his friend, another his neighbour"' . . . "and of the people about three thousand men perished that day."[48]

In other words kill anyone and everyone that comes in your sight, friend or foe, father, brother or son, for the whole camp of Israel were guilty.

The old patriarchal religion had become corrupt. Even in the case of Israel their concept of the morality of God had become degenerate. If this were not so, they never would have undertaken to worship God through base acts of immorality. The problem was that their concept of God had become so human, that in their mind He was like them, even to the point of corruption — and for this there was only one cure — a healthy distance. A distance between God and man, and a good healthy distance between Israel and their Pagan neighbors. The result was that the use of any image or idol as a symbol for God's person was outlawed. From then on, the worship of God would take place completely void of any visual personification of God. This is not to say that Israel lost sight of the idea that God was a person. The whole Bible from Genesis to Revelations proves that their understanding on this point never changed. They knew that God was a man, but it was contrary to their law for them to

[48] *Jerusalem Bible* Ex 32:26–29

portray Him as such through the use of any drawing, idol or image. They also knew that God was their father, and that of necessity He had a wife who was their mother, but it was against the law of Moses for them to acknowledge her existence in any of their cultic rituals. Hence, the worship of our Mother in Heaven was outlawed all together. The 16th chapter of Deuteronomy proclaims the new law:

> Do not set up any wooden Asherah pole beside the altar you build to Yehweh your God, and do not erect a sacred stone, for these Yehweh your God hates. (Deut 16:21–21)

So ancient Israel found themselves in the same situation that the Church is in today. They knew that God was married and that His wife was Asherah, but it was forbiddon to acknowledge Her existence through prayer or any form of ritual worship. They also knew that God was a man, but it was forbidden for them to portray Him as such through the use of any symbol or image.[49]

And what did the Lord have in store for the Cannanites? The scriptures say that their cup was full to overflowing. “Thou shalt utterly destroy”, the Lord said:

> Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stone pillars and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down

[49]The commandment against making idols did not deny that God had an image, it only forbid the children of Israel from making one. Nevertheless, given sufficient time, the ban against images of the Father’s person, in conjunction with the outlawing of Asherah worship, would ultimately have the effect of neutering God. For not only were the people denied the knowledge of the Father’s person, but they were also denied the memory of His female counterpart — hense the lose of the knowledge of God in Israel. All of this would leave Judaism a fertile field for Greek Philosophy.

the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places.[50] (*New International Version*; *Jerusalem Bible* Deut 12:2–3)

You would suppose from this devastating edict that Asherah worship would come to a quick end, but the Bible tells us that it continued to flourish among the children of Israel for more than 600 years after they entered Cannan. Even after that it continued in a new form, right in the Jerusalem Temple until its destruction in 70 A.D.[51] There are many interesting episodes in the Old Testament which are relivant to the Worship of Asherah, far too many to bring up here. There is however one particular event associated with it and also some statistical information which I will share with you before I close.

Remember in accordance with local mythologies, not only had Baal succeeded in intimidating El to gain his thrown, but he had also displaced him as the dominent God of the pantheon, and finally he even took El's wife Asherah for himself. You can imagine how a stalwart like Elijah would feel to go wandering through the hill country and witness all the stone pillars errected to Baal with an image of his mother Asherah standing at Baals side. No doubt all this enfuriated Elijah, and finally he decided to have a showdown.

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[50]In the next verse the Lord indicates that there are still some sanctuaries of El left standing in Cannan, and the Children of Israel are told not to destroy them, but they are instructed not to worship at them, the inference being that they had been desecrated.

[51]By this reference is made to the male and female Cheribum which were found in the Temple at Jerusalem at the time of its destruction. The Law of Moses forbade the making of any image in the likeness of God, and it would seem that the Jews got around this by making images of Cheribum. These were fifteen foot tall winged humans who were plated with gold and set in the Holy of Holies. They were portrayed in sexual embrace, and it is thought by many that their purpose was to symbolize what in accordance with their own law, they could not portray through the use of an image of Yahweh/El and Asherah. (*The Hebrew Goddess* 59–98) Truly, as the Old Testament record faithfully attests — old ideas as basic to life and human nature, such as is belief in a Mother in Heaven, do not die easily.

There were at that time 450 prophets of Baal eating at queen Jezebel's table and also 400 prophets of Asherah, and Elijah instructed king Ahab to summon all the children of Israel, along with all the Prophets of Baal and Asherah to meet him for a rain making contest on Mount Carmel. Remember Baal was a storm god, so making rain was his big thing, and there had been a drought for 7 years. The whole idea was to have a showdown between Baal and Yahweh/El to see who was really God, but the 400 prophets of Asherah were only there as witnesses. The contest was strictly between the Prophets of Baal and Elijah.

After the prophets of Baal had failed to make rain, much to the amazement of the people, Elijah called down fire from Heaven and consummed his sacrifice. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "Jehovah — he is God! Jehovah — he is God", whereupon Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" and "Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there."[52]

What is interesting is that nothing was done to the 400 Prophets of Asherah. They were simply called on to witness what happened to the Prophets of Baal. Obviously the lesson for them was that they had mated Mother Asherah to the wrong god. Subsequent to this, all the sacred stone pillars errected to Baal were destroyed, but the images of Asherah were left standing.[53] We learn from a recent archeological discovery the reason why. The Prophets of Asherah must have got the message. Dr. David Noel Freedman has reported in the Biblical Archaeologist that a large pithos or pottery jar has been found at Quntillet Ajrud,

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[52] 1 Kings 18:19, 39–40

[53] 1 Kings 18:1–46; 2 Kings 10:18–28; 13:6. As Doctor Ralph Pati expressed it: "the Asherah which Ahab had 'made' and set up in Samaria [was not] removed or in any way harmed either as a result of Elijah's victory over the prophets of the Baal, or during the remaining years of Ahab's reign. It would appear then that only the Baal was considered by Elijah (and the strict Yahwists in general) as a dangerous rival of Yahweh, while the Goddess Asherah was regarded as his inevitable, necessary, or at any rate tolerable, female counterpart." (*The Hebrew Goddess* 28)

which is located on the boarder between the southern Negeb and the Sinai peninsula. The following inscription was written on this jar: "I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah". This "inscription has been dated reliably by eminent scholars to around 800 B.C. E. the reign of Jehoahaz, the king of Israel and son and successor of Jehu, [and] can be set in the years 814–800 B.C.E.":

> "In other words, the inscription is contemporary with that king and can be used in conjunction with the statement in 2 Kings 13:6 to clarify the picture. In Samaria, around 800 B.C.E., the official cult of Yahweh included the worship of his consort Asherah."[54]

Dr. Ralph Patai, who is a noted anthropologist and author, has written an excellent book called *The Hebrew Goddess*. In it he goes through the whole history of the worship of Asherah after Israel entered cannan under Joshua. For the most part, I have endeavored to focus on areas which he neglected to mention in his book, but which have great meaning to Latter-day Saints. However there is a great deal of important material which Patai presents in his book that I have not had time to mention here. Some of the most important information pertaining to this has to do with the worship of Asherah in the Jerusalem temple. For hundreds of years the image of Asherah stood next to the alter of Yahweh/El in the temple and as such both Yahweh/El and Asherah were understood to be Husband and Wife, the supreme God and Goddess of the universe. After rehersing the whole history, Dr Patai summmerized his findings as follows:

> To sum up, we find that the worship of Asherah, which had been popular among the Hebrew tribes for three centuries, was introduced into the Jerusalem Temple by King Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, in or about 928 B.C. Her statue was worshiped in the Temple for 35 years, until King Asa removed it in 893 B.C. It was restored to the Temple by King Joash in 825 B.C. and remained there for a full century, until

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[54] *Biblical Archaeologist*, December 1987, pp. 246, 248.

King Hezekiah removed it in 725 B.C. After an absence of 27 years, however, Asherah was back again in the Temple: This time it was King Manasseh who replaced her in 698 B.C. She remained in the Temple for 78 years, until the great reformer King Joshiah removed her in 620 B.C. Upon Joshiah's death eleven years later (609 B.C.), she was again brought back into the Temple, where she remained until its destruction 23 years later, in 586 B.C. Thus it appears that, of the 370 years during which the Solomonic Temple stood in Jerusalem, for no less than 236 years (or almost two-thirds of the time) the statue of Asherah was present in the Temple, and her worship was a part of the legitimate religion approved and led by the king, the court, *and the priesthood* and opposed by only a few prophetic voices crying out against it at relatively long intervals." (*The Hebrew Goddess* 38–39)